

Key to Comments and Commonly Confused Words

See also https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html for information on citing sources.

Ap. Apostrophe use. Use apostrophes to indicate possessive forms. For example, the coat belonging to Bob would be "Bob's coat," not "Bobs coat." A toy belonging to two sisters would be "the sisters' toy" and not "the sister's toy"; the latter form would apply if you were discussing only one sister.

1. Apostrophes are used only rarely to form plurals.
 - Incorrect: The company's held a joint picnic.
 - Correct: The companies held a joint picnic.
2. Although decades used to be written using the apostrophe (the 1920's), currently the correct practice is to omit the apostrophe: the 1920s.
 - Incorrect: 1920's
 - Correct: 1920s
3. The same rule applies to most plurals of abbreviations that used to have apostrophes: *CDs*, *DVDs*, *TVs*, *URLs*.
4. According to the Chicago Manual of Style (15th ed.), "To avoid confusion, lowercase letters and abbreviations with two or more interior periods or with both capital and lowercase letters form the plural with an apostrophe and an s" (7.16). Example: M.A.'s and Ph.D.'s or MAs and PhD's (both are correct); x's and y's, p's and q's.

All of a sudden/All of the sudden. "All of a sudden" is correct.

As/like. "Like" is a preposition; it can be used only with nouns. "As" is a conjunction; it is used with clauses (group of words containing a subject and a verb).

- Correct: My love is like a red, red rose."
- Incorrect: The readers felt like they were watching a play.
- Correct: The readers felt as if they were watching a play.

Block Quotation. Quotations comprising more than four lines of text are usually set off as block quotations. Here are a few hints for using block quotations:

1. *Indent 10 spaces.* Indent the text 10 spaces from the left margin (in Word, hit the Increase Indent button twice).
2. *Double space.* Do not single-space the quotation unless the rest of the document is also in a single-spaced format.
3. *Use a colon.* Block quotations are usually introduced with a full sentence with a colon before the quotation.

4. *No quotation marks.* Do not use quotation marks around the quotation. The fact that it is set apart from the text shows that it is a quotation.

5. *MLA.* In MLA format, put the citation information (Smith 123) after the period at the end of the quotation.

6. *Inside paragraphs.* Block quotations are usually used within paragraphs; it is not necessary to start a new paragraph after using a block quotation.

7. *Be sparing with quotations.* Most important: use only as much of the quotation as you need. The reader will expect to see an analysis of the passage that is about the same length as the passage itself.

Choppy. The notation "choppy" indicates a group of sentences that may be grammatically correct but that seem to have no relationship to each other. Each sentence does not relate closely to the previous sentence, and the effect is that of a paragraph that seems to stop and start with each sentence.

Choppy sentences can be combined to vary the sentence pattern. Also, transitions can help to make choppy sentences flow more smoothly in the paragraph.

Colon. Colons are used to introduce lists, quotations, and final appositives. They typically are used like this: general statement or idea: more specific statement, idea, or example.

1. In the following sentence, the phrase "three things" is the general part of the equation; the phrase "bats, snakes, and toads" constitutes the specific part.

Correct: " She liked three things: bats, snakes, and toads."

2. In this example, "these words" is the general part of the equation, which is followed (after the colon) by the specific quotation that relates to it.

- Correct: " John F. Kennedy inspired a generation with these words: 'Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.'"

3. A good test for a colon is to see whether you can substitute a period for a colon; if not--that is, if the colon does not occur after a full sentence--then the colon should not be used either.

- Incorrect: " Three things he liked are: bats, snakes, and toads."
- Correct: "Three things he liked are bats, snakes, and toads."

4. Colons are used after "as follows" but never after "such as."

Comma. Comma between two parts of a compound sentence. A compound sentence contains two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, for, so, yet), and it requires a comma before the coordinating conjunction.

- Correct: "She thought that *The DaVinci Code* was nonsense, but he believed its claims."

Note that two items in other kinds of compounds do not require commas.

- Correct: "She walked into the water, and she waded across the creek."
- Incorrect: "Students wanted to do their research, and to increase their understanding."
- Correct: "Students wanted to do their research and to increase their understanding."

Comma intro. Commas after introductory clauses and phrases. Use commas after introductory clauses and phrases to prevent confusion.

- Incorrect: "After eating the girl went to her room."
- Correct: "After eating, the girl went to her room."

Comma series. Commas after items in a series (or Oxford comma). A comma should be used after each of the items in a series of three or more.

- Correct: "He liked bats, snakes, and toad
- Don't use a comma if there are only two items.
- Incorrect: "He liked snakes, and toads."
 - Correct: "He liked snakes and toads."

CS. Comma Splice.

A comma splice occurs when two sentences are joined only with a comma.

- Incorrect: "We went to the movies, however, they stayed home."

Comma splices can be corrected in four ways:

1. By breaking the sentences into two using a period. Correct: "We went to the movies. They stayed home."
2. By using a coordinating conjunction (and, or, but, for, so, yet). Correct: "We went to the movies, but they stayed home."
3. By using a subordinating conjunction such as "because." Correct: "We went to the movies, although they stayed home."
4. By using a semicolon to separate the parts. Correct: "We went to the movies; however, they stayed home."

Cosmic opening. The term "cosmic opening" refers to an introductory sentence that is too general for the content of the paper and tells the reader what he or she already knows: "Throughout history, many authors have written literature" or "Since the dawn of time, scapegoats have existed in human society" or "People have always been inspired by the beauties of nature." Although the opening sentence of a paper may be

somewhat more general than what follows, it should not be as general and obvious as these statements.

DM (Dangling modifier) . Dangling modifiers occur when subjects are left out of sentences.

- Incorrect: Driving through the woods, a bear stopped our car.

The "we" that should be the subject has been left out. What remains suggests that the bear is driving the car.

- Correct: When we were driving through the woods, a bear stopped our car.

Diction. Informal level of diction. Blog posts, Facebook updates, texting, Twitter, personal literature journals, and other informal venues are places to try out your ideas and opinions using informal language. However, formal papers use assertions and evidence to prove their points. Simply stating something like "I think Emily Dickinson was crazy" does not constitute evidence; it is an opinion (see Fact, Opinion, Belief, Theory).

Dropped Quotation. A dropped quotation is a quotation inserted into the text without a signal phrase. Note how the quotation in this example is "dropped" into the paragraph so that the reader is unsure who is speaking.

Incorrect: The Swede feared for his life. "You are all out to get me" (Crane 97). Note that the quotation is not linked grammatically with the preceding sentence.

- Correct: The Swede feared for his life: "You are all out to get me" (Crane 97). The colon links the preceding sentence with the quotation. Because both parts of this example are complete sentences, the colon (not the comma) is the appropriate mark to link them.
- Correct: The Swede showed that he feared for his life when he shouted, "You are all out to get me" (Crane 97). This example combines an explanatory sentence with the quotation.
- Correct: The Swede shouted, "You are all out to get me" (Crane 97). This example uses a simple "tag" (a sentence using "wrote," "said," "shouted," "remarked", etc.) to introduce the quotation.

Ellipsis. An ellipsis, which is indicated by three spaced dots (. . .), shows that something has been omitted from the middle of a quotation. The plural of "ellipsis" is "ellipses."

1. With few exceptions, you should not use ellipses at the beginning and end of a quotation.

- Incorrect: For the townspeople, Miss Emily Grierson was " . . . a hereditary obligation on the town . . ." (Faulkner 237).

- Correct: For the townspeople, Miss Emily Grierson was “a hereditary obligation on the town” (Faulkner 237).

According to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, ellipses are typically not used at the beginning or end of a quotation (see 11.57 ff) unless the quotation begins “with a capitalized word (such as a proper name) that did not appear at the beginning of a sentence in the original” (11.65).

2. If the material you’re omitting includes the end of a sentence, you can include the period along with the ellipsis (four periods instead of three).

Fact, Opinion, Belief, Theory. People are often confused about the differences among these concepts, and the words are often misused.

1. A **fact** is an idea generally acknowledged to be true by rational people. It is based on evidence and logic.

2. A **belief** is an idea widely held by a group of people; its truth is evident to them but not to others outside the group. A particular group may call its belief a “fact,” but that does not make it so. A belief may be treated as a fact by those within the group, but those outside the group may not agree.

3. An **opinion** is an idea held by an individual. People often use the term “theory” to describe their opinions, but individual theories are not subject to the same rigorous testing as scientific theory; “theory” in this individual sense has a very different meaning from “scientific theory.”

4. An **assertion**, which is often used in writing, is an arguable idea similar to an opinion, but it must be supported by evidence.

5. A **generalization** is a statement of a conclusion that seems to be based on certain evidence, but generalizations, like assertions, must be supported with evidence.

6. A **scientific theory** is an idea generally acknowledged by rational people to be the best explanation of a natural phenomenon. It is based on physical evidence, the accumulated results of scientific research, and the known laws of science (e.g., the law of conservation of matter). A scientific theory is testable and based on evidence; it is not merely an opinion.

Fragment. A fragment is an incomplete sentence:

Incorrect: We went to the beach. A nice place to be on a hot day.

The second part of the quotation is a fragment.

Fragments need to be corrected by adding a subject or verb where needed, or by joining the fragment to the preceding sentence.

- Correct: We went to the beach, a nice place to be on a hot day.

Fused/Run-on. A fused sentence occurs when two separate sentences are punctuated as a single sentence:

Incorrect: We went to the movies they stayed home.

Fused sentences are like comma splices except that they do not have a comma where the two sentences are joined. They can be corrected in the same four ways:

1. With a coordinating conjunction. Correct: We went to the movies, and they stayed home.
2. With a semicolon. Correct: We went to the movies; they stayed home.
3. With a period. Correct: We went to the movies. They stayed home.
4. With a subordinating conjunction. Correct: When we went to the movies, they stayed home

Hyphen. Hyphens should be used in the following ways:

1. In certain nouns with prefixes: *self-esteem*, *all-American*, *ex-husband*, and so forth.

2. In compound adjectives used before nouns. Example: *rain-soaked roof*; *rose-colored glasses*.

3. In numbers: *twenty-five*, *forty-seven*.

I/you. Indefinite pronoun. Indefinite use of “you” and “it.” Avoid sentences that use an indefinite “you.”

- Incorrect: “In the fourteenth century, you had to struggle to survive.”
- Correct: “In the fourteenth century, a person had to struggle simply to survive.”
- Correct: “In the fourteenth century, people struggled to survive.”
- Incorrect: “In the book, it says that half of all children died before the age of five.”
- Correct: “In *The Middle Ages*, Jones states that half of all children died before the age of five.”

Intensifiers (so, very). The overuse of intensifiers such as “so” or “very” (and, in punctuation, the exclamation point), may be a signal that the paper is relying on emphatic statements (“It was very cold!”) rather than providing evidence of the assertion.

If you find a pattern of these in your paper, reread the paper and ask yourself whether the case you’re making could be supported more effectively.

I think/I feel/I believe. These can almost always be omitted in formal writing. It's your paper; of course you think/believe/feel the statement that follows these words.

- Unnecessary use: "I think that Grace Marks is represented as having a dual personality in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*."
- Better: "Grace Marks is represented as having a dual personality in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*."

Mixed sentences. A mixed sentence occurs when the subject and predicate of a sentence don't match.

1. In the following sentence, the change doesn't grow slowly; the population does.

- Incorrect: "The change in population grew slowly."
- Correct: "The population grew slowly."

2. Sentences that use "is when," "is where," "is because," and such constructions are mixed sentences.

- Incorrect: "An example of irony is when the Swede laughs."
- Correct: "A good example of irony is the Swede's laughter."
- Incorrect: "The reason he was late is because he overslept."
- Correct: "The reason he was late is that he overslept."
- Correct: "He was late because he overslept."

MLA. MLA format requires the author's last name and page number for parenthetical references.

1. For first citations, the title is also incorporated into the signal phrase, or phrase introducing the quotation.

- Correct: In William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," the townspeople view Miss Emily as "a tradition, a duty, and a care, a sort of hereditary obligation on the town" (267).

2. If the author's name does not occur in the signal phrase, it should appear in the parenthetical reference:

- Correct: The townspeople viewed Miss Emily as "a tradition, a duty, and a care" (Faulkner 267).

3. Note that there is no comma between the author's name and the page number.

4. Except in the case of block quotations, the period follows the closing parenthesis rather than being placed inside the quotation marks.

NC. No comma is needed between two parts of a compound construction. For example, no comma is needed between the two verbs in this sentence:

- Incorrect: In "Young Goodman Brown," Hawthorne depicts the stranger as representing the devil, and portrays him as being a part of us.
- Correct: In "Young Goodman Brown," Hawthorne depicts the stranger as representing the devil and portrays him as being a part of us.

NCSV. No comma is necessary between subject and verb.

- Incorrect: The house in the middle of the block, was painted purple.
- Correct: The house in the middle of the block was painted purple.

Not that big a deal/Not that big of a deal. The former—not that big a deal—is always correct.

N/pron agr. Noun-pronoun agreement. Usage has changed over the past decade to incorporate they/their as acceptable pronouns for those whose gender identity requires their use. The following information is provided for

Generally, use a singular pronoun when the antecedent is an indefinite pronoun (someone, each, everyone, anyone).

- Incorrect: Each student got their books.
- Correct: Each student got his or her books.
- Correct: All the students got their books.

Parallel. Faulty parallelism. Grammatical elements in a series need to be consistent in form.

- Incorrect: She liked skydiving, singing, and to dance. Comment: "To dance" is an infinitive, whereas the other verbs are gerunds (-ing participles used as nouns).
- Correct: She liked skydiving, singing, and dancing.
- Incorrect: Her eyes were like a cat. Comment: Were her eyes like a cat, fur and all, or did she have eyes like a cat's eyes?
- Correct: Her eyes were like a cat's.
- Incorrect: Her favorite activities included skydiving, singing, and cakes. Comment: Eating cakes? Making cakes? "Cake" isn't an activity.
- Correct: Her favorite activities included skydiving, singing, and making cakes.

Pron. Pronoun Reference. Vague pronoun reference occurs when the antecedent of the pronoun isn't clear.

- Incorrect: Caitlin told Julie that she was a terrible soccer player. Comment: Who's the bad player, Caitlin or Julie?
- Incorrect: Jason had not drawn a map for the forty-mile hike, which disturbed us. Comment: What's disturbing here--the hike, or the lack of a route?
- Correct: Jason had not drawn a map for the forty-mile hike, a lack of planning that disturbed us.

Res/Nonres. Restrictive and nonrestrictive elements.

Nonrestrictive clauses and phrases are "extra information"; if they are removed, the meaning of the sentence remains the same.

1. Nonrestrictive elements should be set off with commas.

- Correct: The Magna Carta, which was signed in 1215, is a distant ancestor of our Bill of Rights.

The phrase "which was signed in 1215" could be omitted without changing the basic meaning of the sentence.

- Incorrect: The Magna Carta which was signed in 1215 is a distant ancestor of our Bill of Rights.

The lack of commas around "which was signed in 1215" implies that it is restrictive, or essential information. In the context of the sentence, that would imply that the Magna Carta was one of a series of Magna Cartas rather than the only one.

2. Restrictive clauses and phrases are those that would change the meaning of the sentence if removed. Restrictive elements are not set off with commas.

3. The pronoun "that" always signals a restrictive element.

4. One common misuse of nonrestrictive commas involves the titles of literary works. For example, the commas around the title in the example below suggest that it is extra information and that James Joyce only wrote one story (which isn't true).

- Incorrect: In his story, "Araby," James Joyce writes of a young boy's initiation.
- Correct: In his story "Araby," James Joyce tells the story of a young boy's initiation.

Memory tip: Try putting your thumb over the information within the commas. If the sentence changes without that information, the information restricts the meaning of the sentence, and you don't need the commas.

Quot. Quotation Marks. Quotation marks are used to show that another person's words are being quoted,

and their placement varies according to the sentence. In American usage, double quotation marks are used as the default mark.

1. **With periods and commas.** With the exception of MLA citation format, quotation marks are placed OUTSIDE periods and commas.

- Correct: James said, "We must grant the artist his *donnée*."

2. **With semicolons and colons.** Quotation marks go INSIDE semicolons and colons.

- Correct: Howells promoted the "smiling aspects of life"; he also encouraged writers to look at the "real grasshopper."

3. **With exclamation points and question marks.**

Quotation marks may go INSIDE or OUTSIDE exclamation points and question marks.

- Correct: Did Sherman once say, "War is all hell"?
- Correct: Hitler once asked, "Is Paris burning?"

4. Quotations within an already existing quotation (with double " ") are marked with single quotation marks.

Semi. Semicolons.

1. Semicolons separate sentence parts of equal grammatical rank, such as independent clauses or phrases in a series in which the individual items contain commas.

- Correct: We wanted to leave; however, they wanted to stay.
- Correct: He had collected the following: thirty-two fountain pens, each with its own case; forty bottles of ink; a shaker of sand, which he did not need to use since the ink was of the quick-drying kind; and a green paper desk blotter.

2. Semicolons should not be used to separate main clauses from dependent clauses or phrases. The part after the semicolon in the following example would be considered a fragment.

- Incorrect: We went to the beach; a nice place to be on a hot day.
- Correct: We went to the beach, a nice place to be on a hot day.

Shift. The notation "shift" indicates a shift between first person (I), second person (you), or third person (he, she, they, it)

- Incorrect: Students know that they have to read the textbook and you have to study.
- Correct: Students know that they have to read the textbook and that they have to study.

S/V AGR (subject-verb agreement) indicates a singular verb with a plural subject or vice versa. Be sure to use the appropriate verb with singular and plural subjects.

- Incorrect: Source information from the library provide additional information.

- Correct: Source information from the library provides additional information.

Thesis. A thesis statement defines the scope and purpose of the paper. It needs to meet three criteria:

1. It must be **arguable** rather than a statement of fact. It should also say something original about the topic.
2. It must be **limited** enough so that the paper develops in some depth.
3. It must be **unified** so that the paper does not stray from the topic.
4. Statements such as "In this essay I will discuss " or "I will compare two stories" are not thesis statements and are unnecessary, since mentioning the stories in the introduction already tells the reader this.

Read more about thesis statements and topic sentences here: <http://donnamcampbell.net/topic.htm>

Title/Italics. Titles should be marked with italics (underlining) or quotation marks, depending on the work being discussed.

1. Titles of **works that appear within a volume**, such as short stories, poems, and essays, should be placed in quotation marks: "Araby," "The Prophecy," "Dulce et Decorum Est."
2. Titles of **works that are a volume in themselves**, such as books, magazines, newspapers, plays, and movies, should be set off with underlining or italics: *Hamlet*, *Little Women*.
3. **Your own title** should neither be underlined nor placed in quotation marks unless it contains the title of the work you're discussing. In that case, only the title of the work should be punctuated as a title.

Topic. Good topic sentences can improve an essay's readability and organization. They usually meet the following criteria:

1. A topic sentence is usually the first sentence of the paragraph, not the last sentence of the previous paragraph.
2. Topic sentences use keywords or phrases from the thesis to indicate which part of the thesis will be discussed.
3. They tell the reader what concept will be discussed and provide an introduction to the paragraph.
4. They link the subject of the present paragraph to that of the previous paragraph.
5. They may also signal to the reader where the essay has been and where it is headed through signposting words such as "first," "second," or "finally."

Read more about thesis statements and topic sentences

here: <http://donnamcampbell.net/topic.htm>

WW. Wrong word. The "WW" symbol indicates a word that may be correctly spelled but is incorrectly used. It may mean that a preposition is being used in nonstandard ways ("we rode on the car" instead of "we rode in the car") or it may mean that the word used does not fit the meaning or context of the sentence.

Wordy. Wordy sentences are those that use more words than they need in order to get their point across. Some wordy sentences use nouns made from verbs (nominalizations): "He made a declaration" instead of "He declared." Others use excess clauses or phrases: "The book that was blue" instead of "The blue book." Still other wordy sentences may use certain phrases: "Due to the fact" that instead of "Since" or "Because."

Commonly Confused Words

Affect, Effect

1. Affect is a verb; it means "to have an impact or influence upon."

- Incorrect: The moon effects the timing of the tides.
- Correct: The moon affects the timing of the tides.

2. Effect is generally a noun.

- Incorrect: I have that affect on people.
- Correct: I have that effect on people.

3. Two exceptions are as follows:

3a. Psychologists sometimes use "affect" (pronounced AFFect, unlike the verb form affEct) to mean a person's emotional presentation. Example: "Her affect was flat."

3b. "Effect" is used as a verb in specific idioms, such as "to effect a change"--that is, to cause a change to occur. Example: "He effected the change in the rules so that he would be the chairperson permanently."

Accede/Exceed. Accede means "to agree to, to yield to. Exceed means "to go beyond" in the sense of passing beyond limits

- Correct: He acceded to her request.
- Correct: The sheriff gave her a ticket for exceeding the speed limit. Memory tip: "Exceed" is related to excessive.

Accept/Except. Accept means "to receive willingly." Example: "He accepted her invitation." Except means "to exclude." Example: "She invited everyone except her cat."

Begs the question. Begs the question" does not mean "asks the question." To say that something begs the question means that it avoids the question, not that it raises the question. It's a type of logical fallacy

(*petition principii*) that states something as obvious or true when it isn't.

- Incorrect: The budget deficit begs the question of why we are not cutting our spending or raising taxes.
- Correct: The budget deficit raises the question of why we are not cutting our spending or raising taxes.

If you can reword the sentence in which you're using "begs the question" as "asks the question," you're using "begs the question" incorrectly.

Compliment/complement. To compliment (with an "i") means "to praise." To complement (with an "e") means to complete or enhance.

- Correct: The president of the club complimented the committee on its work.
- Correct: The new pillows complemented the decor of the room.
- Incorrect: The new pillows complimented the décor of the room.

Compose/Comprise . Comprise means "is made up of"; the whole comprises its parts. Compose means "to make up": five players compose a basketball team. "Comprised of" should actually be "composed of" in the most common error involving these words.

- Incorrect: Her job was comprised of four different parts.
- Correct: Her job was composed of four different parts.
- Correct: Four parts comprised the major portion of her job.

Conscious/conscience/consciousness. Conscious is an adjective; it means "aware."

- Incorrect: I had a guilty conscious after stealing the apple.
- Correct: I had a guilty conscience after stealing the apple.
- Correct: He was conscious of the wind at his back.

Conscience is a noun; it means "the sense or consciousness of the moral goodness or blameworthiness of one's own conduct, intentions, or character together with a feeling of obligation to do right or be good."

- Correct: Evan's conscience bothered him when he slipped into the movie theater without paying.

Consciousness means "the state of being conscious" or "the totality of conscious states of an individual."

Council/counsel. A *council* (noun) is a group of advisers. To *counsel* someone (verb) is to give that person advice. Sometimes a *counselor* will be said to give "wise counsel" (advice).

Different from/ Different than. *Different from* is preferable to *Different than*.

- Incorrect: The blue dog was different than the rest.
- Correct: The blue dog was different from the rest.

Discrete/Discreet. *Discrete* means "separate." *Discreet* means "unobtrusive."

- Incorrect: He discretely passed the car keys to his friend.
- Correct: He displayed three discrete errors in judgment.
- Correct: Although she tried to be discreet about her preferences, it was clear that she liked the glass slipper best.

Disinterested/Uninterested. Too often, people use "disinterested" to mean "uninterested." Disinterested means "impartial"; uninterested means "having no interest." Example: A judge is--or should be--"disinterested"; a cat is "uninterested" in the outcome of a baseball game.

- Incorrect: Jim was disinterested in listening to Jane's long story about her dream.
- Correct: Jim was uninterested in listening to Jane's long story about her dream.

Everyday, Every day . Everyday (spelled as one word) is an adjective: "The dishes were intended for everyday use." Every day (spelled as two words) functions as an adverb: "I washed my hair every day."

- Incorrect. I work out at the gym everyday.
- Correct: I work out at the gym every day.

Hang, Hung "Hung" is the past tense and past participle form of "hang" and should be used with this one exception: those who are executed by hanging are said to "be hanged."

- Example: Mary Surratt was hanged for her supposed role in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

Infer and Imply . To *infer* something is to deduce a conclusion from someone else's actions. You can infer something from what you see or hear.

- Correct: I inferred that she had the key in her possession because she approached the locked door with such confidence.

To *imply* something is to drop some kind of implicit hint for someone else to pick up.

- Correct: Jane implied that she had the key in her possession, since upon approaching the locked door, she said, "I have this under control."

It's and Its. *It's* is a contraction meaning "it is."

- Correct: It's a beautiful day outside.
- Its* is a possessive form meaning "belonging to it."

- Correct : The groundhog returned to its den on February 2.
- Incorrect: The groundhog returned to it's den on February 2.
- Incorrect: The groundhog returned to its' den on February 2. (There is no such word as its').

Lead, led. *Lead* as a noun is the metal; lead is also the present tense of the verb "to lead."

- Correct: The guide will lead treasure seekers to buried treasure.

Led is the past tense of the verb *lead*.

- Correct: Yesterday he led another group to the same spot.

Lie/lay. *Lie* is an intransitive verb (a verb that takes no direct object); it means "to recline." *Lay* is a transitive verb (a verb that must have a direct object); it means "to put" or "to place." Confusion arises because *lay* is also the past tense form of *lie*. There's also the intransitive verb "to lie," which means "to tell an untruth." See the table below for some help.

Present tense	Past tense	Past participle	Present Participle
Examples of the verb "to lie" ("to recline")			
lie	lay	lain	lying
Example: Today the cat lies on the couch.	Yesterday the cat lay on the couch	Many times the cat has lain on the couch.	As I came into the room, the cat was lying on the couch.
Examples of the verb "to lay" ("to put or place") (Note: This verb always takes a direct object, in this case "book.")			
lay	laid	laid	laying
Today I walk into the room and lay the book on the table.	Yesterday I came into the room and laid the book on the table.	Many times I have come into the room and laid the book on the table.	As I came into the room and was laying the book on the table, a door slammed.
Examples of the verb "to lie" ("to tell an untruth")			
lie	lied	lied	lying
Today he lies about the missing key.	Yesterday he lied about the missing key.	Many times he has lied about the missing key.	Accusing of lying about the missing key, he lied again.

Loath/Loathe. *Loath* (without the e) is an adjective; it means "reluctant."

- Example: "She was loath to unleash the fury of the whole group on its one erring member."

Loathe (with the e) is a verb; it means "to detest."

Example: " He loathed having pink ribbons with cat faces braided into his hair."

Lose/loose.

1. *Lose* is the verb form.

- Incorrect: We did not want to loose our way.
- Correct: We did not want to lose our way.

2. *Loose* is generally an adjective meaning free or unconfined.

- Correct: We appreciated the freedom of loose clothing.

3. Occasionally *loose* is used as a verb meaning "to set free or unleash": " Zeus loosed his powers of destruction on an uncaring world."

Pour/pore. To **pour** something is to distribute a liquid or other material (such as grain) into another container or over another substance. A pore is usually a noun (as in the pores of one's skin), but when **pore** is used as a verb, it means to scrutinize something carefully.

- Incorrect: He poured over the novel as if it could reveal the lost secrets of human immortality.
- Correct: He pored over the novel as if it could reveal the lost secrets of human immortality.
- Correct: He gave up and poured milk over his cornflakes.

Precede/proceed.

1. *Precede* means "to go before." Example: " His reputation as a vampire preceded him."

2. *Proceed* means "to go ahead" or "to begin and continue an action." Example: " Disappointed at our loss in the debate, we proceeded to eat six pints of Ben and Jerry's ice cream."

Simple, simplistic . *Simplistic* is not a more impressive way of saying simple. *Simplistic* is a pejorative (negative) term meaning "overly simple," and it conveys a criticism of the idea being expressed. Saying that an idea is *simplistic* means that it is simple to the point of being stupid.

Their, there, they're.

1. *Their* is possessive; it means "belonging to them." Example: " The hit men got into their car and drove away."

2. *There* refers to a place: " When I got there, no one was around."

3. *They're* is a contraction meaning "they are." Example: " They're unlikely to shoot innocent bystanders."

Then, than. See also "different from, different than"

1. *Then* is a measurement of time: "We went to the movies, and then we came home."

2. *Than* indicates comparison: "He ran more quickly than I did."

To/too/two . To is either the first part of an infinitive phrase ("to laugh") or a preposition ("to the mountain"). Too is an intensifier used before adverbs and adjectives: "We were laughing too hard to speak" and "The dog was too submissive to be a guard dog." Two is the numeral 2.

Verbal, Oral. Many people use the term "verbal communication" to mean "communication transmitted by speech."

1. "Verbal" communication is communication in words; the words can be written as well as spoken.
2. "Oral" communication refers to speech.

Who, whom. *Who* is the subject case; you use *who* when you need a subject for a verb. *Whom* is the object case; you use *whom* when you're using a preposition or another construction in which an object is needed. One easy rule to follow is this, if you're writing a question: Answer the question and see which of those cases you would use.

- Example: (Who, whom) drove your car last night? Since your answer would be " He (and not him) drove my car last night" and he is the subject case (the subject of a verb), you'd use *who* in this question.
- Example: (Who, whom) did you invite to the party? Since your answer would be "I invited him (not he) to the party" and him is the object case, you'd use *whom* in this question.

Woman, Women. "Women" is the plural form of "woman." "A women" is always incorrect; "a woman" is correct.

Your, You're. "Your" is the possessive form of "you": "Give me your money or your life." "You're" is a contraction for "you are": "You're the millionth customer and deserve a prize."